DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 976 HE 010 015

AUTHOR McNally, James L.; Story, Richard W.
TITLE Why Accepted Students Decline to Attend the College at Geneseo, Fall 1977.
INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Genesec. Office of Institutional Research.
PUB DATE Sep 77
NOTE 16p.
AVAILABLE FROM State University of New York, College of Arts and Science, Office of Institutional Research, Geneseo, New York 14454

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attendance Patterns; *College Attendance; College Bound Students; *College Choice; College Programs; Decision Making; Higher Education; *Student Application; Student College Relationship; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS *College Applicants; *State University of New York Genesco

ABSTRACT

A sample of 450 accepted non-enrolling Fall 1977 freshman were surveyed to determine their reasons for applying to but not attending the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Arts and Science at Geneseo. The sample was evenly distributed across the range of Regents Scholarship Examination (RSE) scores and 208 (46.2 percent) responded. The survey found that students apply to Geneseo for several reasons: academic program offered, ease of application, or no particular reason at all. However, it was found that Geneseo was second choice for about a third of the applicants and third or fourth for about two-thirds. Factors affecting applicants' final decision to go elsewhere were reported to be primarily intangible: nearly 80 percent of the applicants were influenced by another school's program just seeming more attractive, and more than one-third of the group was influenced by another school seeming more anxious to have them attend. (Author/SPG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED155976

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH
SUNY GENESEO, NEW YORK

REPORT 77-3

WHY ACCEPTED STUDENTS DECLINE TO ATTEND THE COLLEGE AT GENESEO
FALL 1977

by James L. McNally
Richard W. Story

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
SUNY GENESEO
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

September 1977

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

HE010015

Why Accepted Students Decline to Attend the College at Geneseo
Fall 1977

ABSTRACT

A sample of 450 accepted non-enrolling Fall 1977 freshman applicants was surveyed to determine their reasons for applying to but then not attending the SUNY College of Arts and Science at Geneseo. The sample was evenly distributed across the range of RSE scores; 208 (46.2%) responded. The survey found that only about one-third apply for a strictly academic reason; the final decision to go elsewhere was strongly influenced by non-academic factors such as perceived attractiveness of, or greater perceived interest by, another school.

Why Accepted Students Decline to Attend the College at Geneseo
Fall 1977

I. Background

In the process of applying to college, the typical high school student will file applications to several schools for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is to increase the chances of being accepted by at least one. This multiple application factor must be taken into account by a college admissions staff in order to obtain an entering class. At Geneseo, the ratio of the applications to eventual enrollments has been roughly 6 to 1 for the past few years.

Given the increased competition for students by both public and private postsecondary institutions and in the face of a soon-to-be-declining applicant pool, it becomes apparent that the application-enrollment ratio will decline, with severe implications for a college achieving its enrollment goal. A better understanding of why accepted students decline to attend a given school should prove instructive in planning and developing admissions strategies. This survey was undertaken to provide such an understanding for the College at Geneseo.

II. Procedure

A. Instrument

During July 1977 the outline of a student decline study was discussed by several staff members; as a result drafts of a covering letter and survey were prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and circulated to several individuals for review and comment. The survey form was relatively brief and contained questions such as,why a student applied to Geneseo in the first place, the rank-order preference for the College, the quality of Geneseo's promotional material, the college they are actually attending, the attractiveness of Geneseo's programs, and several other influential factors.

Several excellent observations were made by the reviewers, and both the covering letter and forms were revised for an August mailing. A postage-paid return envelope was included. (See Appendix A for the covering letter and Appendix B for the survey form.)

B. Sample

Because of the large number of applicants involved it was decided to draw a random sample of 450 across the range of Regents Scholarship Examination (RSE) performance. By subdividing the sample into High, Middle, and Low RSE score groups it would be possible to look for any particular patterns among the groups. The groups were defined by establishing RSE score points one-half standard deviation above and below the Fall 1977 Geneseo freshman mean of 164. Equal numbers of students from each group were selected and an early August mailing was completed specifying a return date of September 1. A total of 208 completed forms was returned, 46.2%, a most gratifying response because these potential students had no particular obligation to Geneseo.

TABLE 1
Sample

Group	RSE Score	Number Sent	Number Returned	Percent Returned
High	178+	150	87	*58.0*
Middle	137 to 177	150	65	*43.3*
Low	136 -	150	56	*37.3*
Total		450	208	*46.2*

III. Findings

The results are reported in a series of brief narratives and supporting Tables.* For ease of review, data are presented in the tables in percentage terms without the accompanying response "N's."* This is a departure from previous reports and interested readers should feel free to contact the Office of Institutional Research for the accompanying response "N's" if desired.

A. Sex of Respondents

The male-female ratio of *33.8%* men to *66.2%* women is very similar to the actual Fall 1976 full-time undergraduate distribution at the College. However, the High Group deviates from the pattern with *42.5%* men and *57.5%* women. The point suggested is that of the High ability men applicants a larger proportion tend to go elsewhere to college.

TABLE 2
Sex of Respondents

Sex	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent		
		High	Middle	Low
Men	*33.8*	*42.5*	*31.3*	*23.2*
Women	*66.2*	*57.5*	*68.7*	*76.8*

B. Most Important Influence to Apply

The applicants surveyed were given a list of seven possible influences and asked to mark the one that had been most important to them. For more than one quarter of each group the option "Geneseo offered a particular academic program" was checked most frequently. This is gratifying in the sense that academic programs are such a major part of what a college is all about. For all three groups, the second-most frequently checked reason was "the SUNY application form made it easy;" and the reason "nothing in particular" was third-most often checked. These last two options are much less encouraging in that they show at least one-third of the applicants were choosing Geneseo for non-academic, if not "trivial" reasons.

*N = number of students responding

The non-academic factor "distance away from home, which I wanted" was also checked by a substantial number of applicants from each of the ability bands, and this too is troubling to persons who would like to hope that the reason for applying to a college is largely one of academic/curricular factors. These data suggest that that is not wholly true of the Geneseo choice.

TABLE 3
Most Important Influence to Apply

Reason	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Close to home	5.4	6.9	1.6	7.3
Away from home	12.2	9.2	17.5	10.9
Size of Geneseo	11.7	13.8	12.7	7.3
Geneseo aid offered	1.0	1.1	1.6	0.0
Nothing in particular	16.6	16.1	17.5	16.4
SUNY form made it easy	22.0	24.1	23.8	16.4
A particular program	31.2	28.7	25.4	41.8

C. Rank of Geneseo Choice

The College was second choice for only 33.5% of the Total Group, and third or fourth choice for over sixty percent. Such a pattern shows that the College is not overwhelmingly even second best choice of these applicants. In light of this it would seem that any promotional activities should not only be of a high quality but intensified as well.

TABLE 4
Rank of Geneseo Choice

Rank	Total Group	Rse Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Second	33.5	31.4	26.2	44.6
Third	31.5	27.9	34.4	33.9
Fourth	35.0	40.7	39.3	21.4

D. Geneseo's Descriptive Literature

Just under sixty percent of the Total group described the College's promotional literature as "generally helpful and informative." The Middle Group was more complimentary than either of the other two groups. At the other end, about one third of the group described the literature as "so-so" or "not very helpful or informative." In a competitve recruiting arena only the most positive responses are desirable; the responses to this item suggest that the literature needs careful review (as will apparently be forthcoming from the publications specialist recently added to the College staff.) A final note worth bringing up is that nearly 10% of the respondents report not having received any College literature at all.

The responses to this item should be kept particularly in mind, along with those relating to why these students applied to Geneseo in the first place, when reviewing the reported reasons for going to another school (to be discussed below.)

TABLE 5
Geneseo's Descriptive Literature

Comment	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Generally helpful	58.9	56.8	69.4	50.0
So-so	22.3	23.5	12.9	31.5
Wasn't helpful	10.2	11.1	8.1	11.1
Didn't receive any	8.6	8.6	9.7	7.4

E. School Actually Going-To

The large majority of respondents are attending four-year colleges and universities with "Private Coll. or Univ." attracting 40.7% followed by "SUNY 4-yr Coll." with 38.7%. High ability students favor private schools, 48.1%, and SUNY Centers, 22.2% to a much greater extent than the other two groups. A majority, 52.9%, of the Lower Group prefers "SUNY 4-yr Coll.". It appears that the competition for students is focused primarily on four-year rather than two-year schools, and to a large extent between SUNY Arts and Science colleges and private colleges with the previously noted exception of the High Group. (See Appendices C, D, E, for the names of the colleges being attended by the High, Middle, and Low Groups respectively.)

TABLE 6
School Actually Going-To

School	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
SUNY Comm Coll.	3.6	1.2	6.5	3.9
SUNY Ag & Tech Coll.	1.5	1.2	1.6	2.0
SUNY 4-Yr Coll.	38.7	25.9	43.5	52.9
SUNY Univ. Center	13.4	22.2	6.5	7.8
Private Coll. or Univ.	40.7	48.1	37.1	33.3
Non-NY Public	2.1	1.2	4.8	0.0

F. Geneseo Not Having Desired Academic Program

Over half of the Total Group indicated that Geneseo not having their desired academic program was not an influence in their decision. This makes some sense in the face of the assumption that applicants in search of a particular program have already ascertained whether Geneseo offers

their desired program. Some applicants apparently hadn't done their homework, though, because about a fifth said that our not having the desired program was a "strong influence" (not to attend).

TABLE 7
Geneseo Not Having Desired Academic Program

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an influence	59.5	60.2	54.8	64.0
Slight influence	8.7	7.2	12.9	6.0
Moderate influence	12.8	12.0	14.5	12.0
Strong influence	19.0	20.5	17.7	18.0

G. Could Not Get Into Desired Program at Geneseo

This item is somewhat of a companion item to the preceding one. Students who are accepted can generally enroll in their desired program. This is particularly true of the High Group where 97.5% indicated that they were not influenced by not being able to get into the program they wanted.

TABLE 8
Could Not Get Into Desired Program at Geneseo

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an influence	90.1	97.5	81.4	88.2
Slight influence	2.1	0.0	6.8	0.0
Moderate influence	2.6	1.2	3.4	3.9
Strong influence	5.2	1.2	8.5	7.8

H. Another School's Program Seemed More Attractive

The perceived "attracti eness" of another school's (academic) program was, by a very wide rgin, most influential in convincing this sample of accepted applicants to go elsewhere to school. No other item comes close to eliciting a 62.8% "strong influence" from the Total Group (and a disappointing 65.9% from the High Group). When the "moderate influence" percentage is added to the "strong" response the sum shows that 79.7% of the Total Group was at least moderately influenced by another school's apparent greater attractiveness.

TABLE 9
Another School's Program Seemed More Attractive

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an influence	11.1	10.6	9.7	13.5
Slight influence	9.0	12.9	11.3	0.0
Moderate influence	17.1	10.6	19.4	25.0
Strong influence	62.8	65.9	59.7	61.5

I. Better Financial Aid Offer From Another School

In the decision not to attend Geneseo, the availability of assistance was not an influence for about 70% of the High Group and and at least 80% of the Middle and Low Groups. However, 20.7% of the High Group was strongly influenced by the availability of aid elsewhere. It could well be that private institutions, with their scholarship and special aid programs, can be more competitive in the quest for "good students," but that Geneseo does reasonably well with an aid package for the average applicant.

TABLE 10
Better Financial Aid Offer From Another School

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an influence	75.8	69.5	80.3	80.4
Slight influence	5.7	3.7	8.2	5.9
Moderate influence	4.1	6.1	1.6	3.9
Strong influence	14.4	20.7	9.8	9.8

J. More Attractive Materials From Another School

Over half of the Total Group was not influenced by another school's material; but conversely 22.4% of the group was moderately to strongly influenced. This latter percentage is significant in suggesting that attractive literature and materials are important features of the admissions effort. It can't hurt, and apparently does influence some students.

TABLE 11
More Attractive Materials From Another School

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an Influence	59.7	65.9	58.1	51.9
Slight influence	17.9	13.4	22.6	19.2
Moderate influence	15.8	12.2	12.9	25.0
Strong influence	6.6	8.5	6.5	3.8

K. Another School More Anxious to Have Me Attend

The final decision to attend a given college is probably based on several factors, but the basic psychological notion of being wanted must certainly play a part--indeed, the figures of Table 12 say exactly that. The item "having another school seem more anxious to have me attend" is the second most significant (after perceived attractiveness, Table 9) in explaining why applicants accepted at Geneseo went elsewhere to college. More than one third of the Total Group and an even larger percentage of the High Group, report that they were moderately

or strongly influenced by the other school's interest in having them attend. Our respondents don't say how this interest was expressed, but it was certainly effective.

TABLE 12
Another School More Anxious to Have Me Attend

Response	Total Group	RSE Group by Percent High	Middle	Low
Not an influence	47.0	49.4	47.6	42.3
Slight influence	17.7	12.0	20.6	23.1
Moderate influence	15.2	16.9	14.3	13.5
Strong influence	20.2	21.7	17.5	21.2

IV. Summary and Discussion

The survey found that students apply to Geneseo for several reasons: nearly onethird apply because the College has a particular academic program that they want, more than a fifth apply because the common SUNY application form makes it easy to do so, and about one sixth apply for no particular reason at all. The reasons of size and being away from home are each responsible for about a tenth of all applications.

The College is not a high-rank choice for very many--Geneseo is second choice for about a third (but for a larger percentage of the Low group), and third or fourth choice for about two-thirds. The College was first choice for less than 5% of the total group. These two items, then, suggest that quite a few of our applicants don't have their hearts and minds totally committed to Geneseo--we're the second or lower choice school that they apply to, often without any really substantial academic reason. It should not be difficult to sway such casual applicants to attend another school, and later survey items showed this to be true.

When asked about factors that affected their final decision to go elsewhere, the respondents said that intangibles were most responsible: very nearly 80% were moderately or strongly influenced by another schools' program just seeming more attractive, and more than one-third of the group was moderately or strongly influenced by another school's seeming more anxious to have them attend. None of the reasons like,Geneseo's not having their desired program, not being able to get into the desired program at Geneseo or Geneseo's financial aid offer was particularly responsible for these applicants not coming--the intangibles cited earlier were more important, according to the finding of this survey.

These disappointing findings contain some basis for hope, in that a very substantial portion of the reason accepted applicants don't attend is motivational, rather than programmatic, and motivation is susceptible to change by such things as brochures, pamphlets, media presentations (slides, films), and plain serious talk. Substantial programmatic change could take a few years to effect. In sum, since they didn't particularly dislike Geneseo (they just liked somebody else more), it should be that much easier to convince them of the merits and benefits of the programs and possibilities at Geneseo.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE, GENESEO, N.Y. 14454

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

August 1977

Dear Student:

As I'm sure you know, many college-bound high school graduates apply to more than one college or university. Perhaps you have done so yourself. The colleges, in turn, admit many more applicants than will actually enroll.

For the Fall 1977 freshman class the College at Geneseo admitted a number of qualified applicants who have since decided not to attend the college. Quite frankly, we would like to know why admitted applicants decide to go elsewhere to college.

You are one of a sample of students being contacted to complete the brief accompanying questionnaire and to return it in the pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope provided. You will be helping us by providing much needed information for use in long range planning. If you wish, feel free to write any additional comments on the reverse side of the form.

I hope that you will consider this a reasonable request and take the few minutes necessary to assist us. Thank you very much for your cooperation and help.

Sincerely,

James L. McNally
Director

JLM:cr
Enclosure

P.S. It would be very much appreciated if you could respond as soon as possible and preferably by September 1.

Office of Institutional Research
SUNY Geneseo

APPENDIX B
August 1977

Decline Survey

Directions: Please respond anonymously to this survey.

1. Sex

   a. ☐ Male
   b. ☐ Female

2. County of Residence_____

3. What one thing in particular most influenced your decision to apply to Geneseo?

   a. ☐ Geneseo was close to my home, which I wanted.
   b. ☐ Geneseo was a distance away from home, which I wanted.
   c. ☐ I wanted a school the size of Geneseo.
   d. ☐ Geneseo offered me the financial aid I needed.
   e. ☐ There was nothing in particular--I just sort of did it without too much thought.
   f. ☐ SUNY common application form made it convenient and cheaper to indicate "Geneseo."
   g. ☐ Geneseo offered a particular academic program I wanted.
   If you answered "g," what was the program?_____

4. Using the list of reasons given in question 3, what was the second most important reason for applying to Geneseo?

   a. ☐ b. ☐ c. ☐ d. ☐ e. ☐ f. ☐
   g. ☐ h. ☐ There wasn't really a second most important reason.

5. What rank was Geneseo in your list of schools applied to?

   a. ☐ First choice
   b. ☐ Second choice
   c. ☐ Third choice
   d. ☐ Fourth choice

6. After being accepted at Geneseo what did you think about the descriptive literature (pamphlets, brochures, and so forth) that you received from the College?

   a. ☐ They were generally pretty helpful and informative.
   b. ☐ They were just so-so.
   c. ☐ They weren't very helpful or informative.
   d. ☐ I didn't receive any descriptive literature.

7. What other colleges or universities were you accepted at? (Write in names and put a star beside the one you are actually going to this Fall.)

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. What will your major be_____?

9. How did each of the following factors affect your final decision to go to another college instead of Geneseo?

	a strong influence	a moderate influence	a slight influence	not an influence
a. Finding that Geneseo didn't really have the academic program I wanted.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Finding that I couldn't get into the program I wanted at Geneseo.	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Another school's program just seeming better or more appealing to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Getting a better (more desirable) financial aid offer from another school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Receiving more attractive materials from another school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Having another school seem much more anxious to have me attend there.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please return to:

Office of Institutional Research
Erwin 220
State University College
Geneseo, NY 14454

APPENDIX C

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE, GENESEO, N.Y. 14454

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Decline by Accepted Freshmen
Fall 1977
High RSE Score Group (178 and above)

Alfred University

Barnard College
Boston College

C.W. Post
Canisius College
Catholic University
Colgate University
College of New Rochelle--2
College of St. Rose
Cornell University--4

Grove City College

Hobart College--3
Hood College

Manhattan College
Miami University
Michigan State University
Mount Holyoke College
Muhlenberg College

New York University
Niagara University

Rochester Institute of Technology

St. Bonaventure University--2
St. Lawrence University
Skidmore College
SUNY--University Centers:
Albany--2
Binghamton--9
Buffalo--7 *Total equals 19*
Stony Brook--1

SUNY--Colleges
Brockport--2
Buffalo--3
Cortland--3 *Total equals 24*
Fredonia--3
Oneonta--2
Oswego--3
Potsdam--4
Purchase--1
Plattsburgh--3

SUNY--Community Colleges & Ag & Tech.
Adirondack Community College
Cobleskill Ag & Tech
Syracuse University

Texas Christian University

Union College
University of Denver
University of Rochester
Utica College

Wake Forest University
Williams College

APPENDIX D

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE, GENESEO, N.Y. 14454

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Decline by Accepted Freshmen
Fall 1977
Middle RSE Score Group (137-177)

Allegheny College

Boston University--2
Brandeis University
Bryant College

College of Mt. St. Vincent
College of St. Rose

Elmira College

Fordham University

Harvard University

Maria College

Ohio Wesleyan University

St. John Fisher College--2
St. Michael's College
Southampton College
SUNY--University Centers:
Albany--3
Buffalo--1 *Total equals 6*
Stony Brook--2

SUNY--Colleges:
Brockport--1
Buffalo--4
Cortland--3 *Total equals 25*
Fredonia--3
Oneonta--5
Oswego--3
Plattsburgh--4
Potsdam--1
Purchase--1

SUNY Community Colleges & Ag & Tech.
Cobleskill Ag & Tech
Erie Community College
Mohawk Valley Community College
Rockland Community College
Westchester Community College

University of Bridgeport
University of Delaware
University of Hartford
University of Rochester
University of South Carolina

West Virginia University
Western Washington State
Wittenberg University

APPENDIX E

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE, GENESEO, N.Y. 14454

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Decline by Accepted Freshmen
Fall 1977
Low RSE Score Group (136 & below)

C.W. Post
CUNY--Baruch College

Denison University
Dowling University

Edinboro State College

Gettysburg College
Guilford College

Hofstra University

Ithaca College

Jacksonville University

Keene State College

Ladycliff College

Marymount College

Niagara University

Russell Sage College

St. Bonaventure University
St. John Fisher College
SUNY--University Centers:
Binghamton--1
Buffalo--1 *Total equals 4*
Stony Brook--2

SUNY--Colleges:
Brockport--2
Cortland--7
Fredonia--3 *Total equals 28*
New Paltz--1
Oswego--5
Plattsburgh--5
Potsdam--4
Purchase--1

SUNY--Community Colleges & Ag & Tech.
Farmingdale Ag & Tech
Genesee Community College
Onondaga Community College

University of Tampa